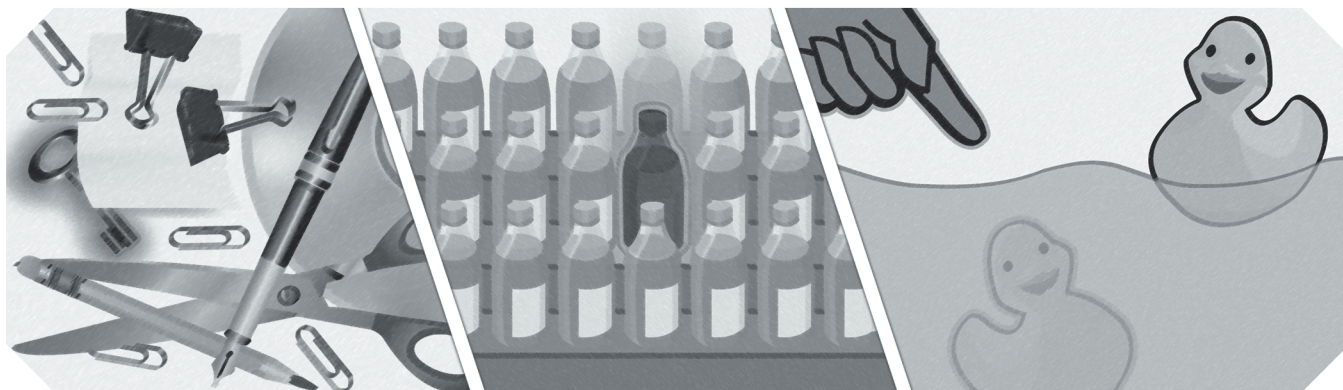


GURPS®

Fourth Edition

MAGIC™

THE LEAST OF SPELLS™



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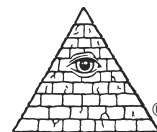
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*The simplest things are often
the truest.*

– Richard Bach

INTRODUCTION

Games featuring magic-users tend to focus on higher-powered casters. *GURPS* is no exception. *GURPS Magic* includes some low-powered spells, but many more that could change the face of combat or society at large – up to and including spells that resurrect the dead and grant wishes! *GURPS Magic: Death Spells* and *GURPS Magic: Artillery Spells* offer more of the same, in the form of magic that can obliterate targets in one fell swoop.

Which is as it should be.

It's the rare gamer who enjoys playing an ineffective character. Even those who favor “zero to hero” stories expect their apprentice wizards to wield genuine power *eventually*. And in campaigns where magic is the exclusive province of NPCs, it's most often meant to be a source of wonder, danger, or *horror*, which calls for it to be impressive.

Yet magical “zeroes” still need spells. At the higher end of the power spectrum, it's fun (and a good way to soak up character points!) if almost anyone can dabble in magic without invading the niche of *real* wizards. And in campaigns where most magicians are villains, permitting PCs to work *trivial* magic can appease players who dislike absolute prohibitions, provide an interesting temptation to resist, and throw the capabilities of evil sorcerers, demons, and other magic-using fiends into terrifying relief – being outclassed frightens gamers more than the unknown, and makes victory tastes sweeter.

And one final case bears mention: Settings where everybody can work a little magic. This has to do not with the power level of the protagonists, who might be anything from “zeroes” to gods, but with that of the *magic*, which is low (except, perhaps,

for a rare few archmages). Making the mana level high is one solution, and making everyone a mage is another, but such devices raise the question of why magic isn't more dominant. Minor “folk rituals” that indisputably *do something* for almost anyone, almost anywhere offer a workaround.

GURPS Magic: The Least of Spells is a collection of minor magic suited to *all* of these uses.

RECOMMENDED BOOKS

GURPS Magic: The Least of Spells requires only the *GURPS Basic Set*. While *GURPS Magic* would be useful to have on hand for its more detailed magic rules, and many of its spells are mentioned here, it isn't required to understand this supplement.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Sean Punch set out to become a particle physicist in 1985 and ended up as *GURPS* Line Editor in 1995. In that capacity, he has written, edited, or contributed to some 150 *GURPS* releases, revised the game into its fourth edition (2004), and been a regular contributor to *Pyramid* magazine. From 2008, he has served as the lead creator of the *GURPS Dungeon Fantasy* series, which led to his design of the *Dungeon Fantasy Roleplaying Game*, released in 2017. Sean has been a gamer since 1979, but devotes most of his spare time to Argentine tango (and occasionally tending bar). He lives in Montréal, Québec with *son amour*, Geneviève.

ABOUT GURPS

Steve Jackson Games is committed to full support of *GURPS* players. We can be reached by email: info@sjgames.com. Our address is SJ Games, P.O. Box 18957, Austin, TX 78760. Resources include:

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with #GURPShook on Twitter. Or explore that hashtag for ideas to add to your own game! The *GURPS Magic: The Least of Spells* web page is at gurps.sjgames.com/theleastofspells.

Store Finder (storefinder.sjgames.com): Discover nearby places to buy *GURPS* items and other Steve Jackson Games products. Local shops are great places to play our games and meet fellow gamers!

Bibliographies. Bibliographies are a great resource for finding more of what you love! We've added them to many *GURPS* book web pages with links to help you find the next perfect element for your game.

Errata. Everyone makes mistakes, including us – but we do our best to fix our errors. Errata pages for *GURPS* releases are available at sjgames.com/errata/gurps.

Rules and statistics in this book are specifically for the *GURPS Basic Set, Fourth Edition*. Page references that begin with B refer to that book, not this one.

CHAPTER ONE

THINKING SMALL

Trivial spells require doing things a little differently. If they're just low-powered-but-typical magic, then singling them out as available to fresh-faced apprentices and ungifted dabblers while excluding basic spells is tricky to justify. After all, **GURPS Magic** has 45 spells that lack spell prerequisites, of which 31 don't even require Magery. Giving the least of spells properties that render them qualitatively *different* from these (and other) spells makes the distinction easier to defend – and adds flavor!

The Least of Glossaries

basic spell: An IQ/H or IQ/VH spell with no *spells* as prerequisites. It may require *other* traits, most often Magery or minimum IQ. Even if nonmages can learn it, they need high or better mana to cast it.

trivial spell: An IQ/A spell with *no prerequisites at all*. Anybody can learn it, and anybody can *cast* it in normal or better mana. Synonymous with “IQ/A spell” or, collectively, the “least of spells.” In setting, people might prefer “cantrip,” “chant,” “folk ritual,” “incantation,” “invocation,” “mantra,” etc.

DIFFICULTY

The most obvious thing to change is difficulty! Full-fledged spells – even very simple ones like Ignite Fire, Light, and Touch – are IQ/Hard or IQ/Very Hard skills. It's logical to make the least of spells easier.

All of the spells in this collection are IQ/*Average*. Add Magery to IQ as usual. When using optional rules that give spells defaults (like the Wizardly Dabbler perk in **GURPS Thaumatology: Magical Styles**), the defaults for Average spells are one step easier than those for Hard spells (typically IQ-5 rather than IQ-6).

PREREQUISITES . . . AND MANA LEVEL

The least of spells certainly shouldn't require other spells as prerequisites – they're supposed to be what people who know *nothing* about magic can just up and learn! But what about Magery?

In the standard magic rules, anybody can *learn* a spell that doesn't require Magery, but individuals without Magery can *cast* that spell only in a zone of high or better mana.

Yet requiring dabblers to buy at least Magery 0 [5] largely defeats the purpose of letting the ungifted learn magic. The solution is to let anybody cast IQ/A spells, even in normal mana. For spells weaker than anything in **Magic**, this is unlikely to lead to the untalented invading the niche of professionals, who have far more powerful tools at their disposal.

At the same time, a gift for magic should count for *something* – even for the least of spells. People who have Magery 1+ do get a bonus to skill level, but this doesn't benefit those with Magery 0. It also doesn't fully compensate for letting anybody work magic in normal mana.

The solution is to alter the effects of mana level on IQ/A spells (only!) as follows:

High or Very High Mana: Anyone who knows IQ/A spells can cast them – and such spells are so weak that failures and critical failures are no worse than usual, even in very high mana. Someone with Magery gets the FP spent on such a spell back at the start of their *next* turn, as in a zone of very high mana for a harder spell.

Normal Mana: Anyone who knows IQ/A spells can cast them. All the rules for magic work normally, unless specifically excepted for IQ/A spells.

Low Mana: Only those with Magery can cast IQ/A spells, but such spells require so little magic that they're *exempt* from the -5 to skill that such areas inflict on harder spells. Critical failures with IQ/A spells always count as ordinary failures.

No Mana: No one can use magic – not even IQ/A spells.

Thus, the talented have a *major* edge over the untalented with trivial spells: In regions of higher-than-normal mana, they can work such magic all day with almost no ill effects. In low mana, they regain their monopoly on magic – and gain something to fall back on when their harder spells aren't working well.

ITEMS

The spells in this collection are so low-powered that it's hard to imagine any serious enchanter spending time on them. Still, the GM may allow people who want items that cast such spells to have them. In place of individual “Item” entries, these generic rules apply in all cases:

Creation: Energy cost to create is always 25. Use the standard enchanting rules; see **Magic**, pp. 16-18. Notably, the creator rolls against the *lower* of Enchant or the specific spell, and requires effective skill 15 or better. Thus, even if a non-mage can cast the spell, it takes someone with Enchant – and thus Magery 2+ – to create the associated item.

Throw Voice (A)

Regular

Subject can do what ventriloquism is *reputed* to do (but cannot!): Make their voice literally emerge from a distant point. This requires a Ventriloquism (p. B228) roll, at -1 per yard of distance; a subject without that skill uses IQ-6 (normally, Ventriloquism has no default), still at -1 per yard. Popular with bards and other entertainers!

Also a Body Control spell.

Duration: 1 minute.

Cost: 2 to cast. 1 to maintain.

Time to cast: 2 seconds.

TECHNOLOGICAL SPELLS

This college is most useful in settings with widespread machinery. Such backgrounds feature many cheap gizmos that anyone can use without effort, so it's fair to allow IQ/A spells – which cost character points and require energy – to be at least as useful as these.

Wizardly Workshop (p. 12) is also considered a Technological spell, and might merit a /TL in settings where tech level varies significantly.

Magnetic Finger (A)

Regular

One of the caster's fingers becomes magnetic. Effective ST 1 lets it attract and pick up 0.2 lb. of objects containing iron, nickel, or cobalt, as long as they're within one inch. Works through most materials, though not metals. Mainly useful for quickly collecting many tiny objects, like spilled tacks – but clever casters will cook up other uses.

Duration: 1 minute.

Cost: 1. Same to maintain.

Remote Start/TL (A)

Regular

Causes subject machine to switch *on* or *off*, if this requires nothing more complicated than pushing, pulling, or turning a control. Any key must be in place (Remote Start can't bypass security measures), and the caster must know how to operate the device and make any skill roll required for startup or shut-down. Doesn't grant control – just “hands free” activation or deactivation.

Duration: Instantaneous. Machine remains on or off as usual.

Cost: 1. Cannot be maintained.

NOVICES AND LAYPEOPLE

Any of these spells *could* be “holy.” The only absolutely essential changes are to read “mana” as “sanctity” for sacred spells, and to use Power Investiture (not Magery) to assess IQ bonuses and higher levels of effect. Yet in most settings, wizards can learn more spells than clerics, raising the question of which ones the gods grant.

Adjuration generally fits. **Ack might**, if deities communicate directly with the faithful. **Invoke** is probably either widespread or strictly forbidden, depending on whether gods like to hear their names more than they worry about mortals calling demons!

Traditional fantasy RPG clerics nourish, cure, and protect, suggesting Food, Healing, and Protection and Warning spells. But not *everything* in those colleges! Holiness is often associated with moderation or asceticism, rendering spells like **Bender Defender** and **Glutton's Cheat** unsuitable, and many faiths take a dim view of **Birth Control**. Conversely, **Ritual of Reaping**, **Spell of Sowing**, and protective magic that falls outside the three key colleges (like **Cushion**) *do* fit.

In faiths with organized worship, serious devotees may be expected to learn **Aide** for healing ceremonies, **Patience** to sit through long services, and **Stifle** to preserve ritual decorum. Lay clergy might use **Image** to project holy icons, perfumed versions of **Puff** to replace incense, and **Tack** to post religious tracts. Sermons would benefit from **Know Thyself**.

Other spells suit deities whose “divine spheres” mirror the magical colleges to which the magic belongs: Fire

spells for fire gods, Necromantic spells for death gods, etc. Creative thinking may be needed; e.g., **Diver's Blessing** isn't a Water spell but *is* thematic for sea gods, while **Badger Paws**, **Spotless Hands**, and **Stinkguard** aren't Necromantic but suit death cultists who regularly inhume and exhume corpses.

Spells related to mana and wizardly pursuits don't feel like gifts that deities other than gods of magic would grant. **Emergency Staff**, **Magician's Minion**, **Sorcerer's Stand-In**, **Thaumatomancy**, and **Use Item** fall into this category.

Then there are silly or juvenile spells. Examples are things like **Belch**, **Cloud**, **Squeak**, and even **Dramatic Departure**. These are undignified for deities other than tricksters.

But in a society where everybody prays, nothing is *completely* implausible. If minor prayers work for anyone, while wizards always need mana, *all* of these IQ/A spells might be possible as holy but not wizardly magic.

Lastly, for the druidic magic in **GURPS Dungeon Fantasy**, it's best to stick to Animal, Earth, Plant, and Weather spells, plus fitting Air and Water spells (GM's decision). Rather than adapt Chapter 1's rules for mana to Nature's Strength, assume that anyone can cast IQ/A druidic spells, but that users without Power Investiture (Druidic) *halve* bonuses and round down (e.g., +3 becomes +1) but suffer full penalties, while those with that advantage *halve* penalties and drop fractions (-3 becomes -1) but enjoy full bonuses.

CHAPTER THREE

MAKING THE MOST OF THE LEAST

In high-powered fantasy (like *GURPS Dungeon Fantasy*) and settings where magic is common and society-changing, most career spellcasters are individuals with Magery, Power Investiture, or similar who've had a chance to study IQ/Hard and IQ/Very Hard spells. Yet that's a loaded statement! The reality depends on the GM's world-building decisions.

If the only magic available is low-powered, it can be widespread *without* changing society much. The existence of forces that violate physical laws even a little would shake science to its core, but the average person wouldn't notice or care – how many people today worry about, never mind *grasp*, quantum mechanics, relativity, thermodynamics, etc.? More important to ordinary people, an IQ/Average spell is as time-consuming to learn as a Professional Skill yet useful for a single, trivial purpose. If that one thing is comparable to cheap consumer technology in capability, and the spell is fatiguing, magic is unlikely to replace tech, much less revolutionize anything.

In worlds where high-powered heroes have epic adventures, magic can be powerful and transformative without being *commonplace*. It might be controlled by a few NPCs who hoard it jealously as they pursue megalomaniac goals such as immortality, world conquest, and godhood. Everyone else gets “scraps.” This approach is common in pulp sword-and-sorcery tales.

Finally, magic being powerful *and* widely taught to anyone with the means to learn it doesn't guarantee widespread Magery – in game terms, Magery may cost extra or call for an Unusual Background. Training in IQ/H and IQ/VH spells might be as demanding as any other profession that requires multiple Hard and Very Hard skills, like becoming a brain surgeon or an astronaut, and require social advantages or a different Unusual Background. Indeed, *all* of these things could be true!

All of the above possibilities leave room for career casters who *specialize* in trivial spells. In weak-magic backgrounds, these are individuals with enough of a knack for IQ/A spells to learn many of them quickly at skill levels where they aren't fatiguing to cast. In strong-magic settings where only evil NPCs are powerful wizards, “hedge magician” is likewise its own career – and to survive epic adventures alongside mighty-thewed warriors and legendary rogues, such a hero needs to

be *capable*. And in worlds where magic is both strong and available, but the gifts and/or privilege needed to exploit it are uncommon, there are sure to be “supporting professions,” just as surgeons and astronauts rely on armies of technicians.

What abilities do *these* people have?

ADVANTAGES FOR MINOR MAGICIANS

Those who *can* have gifts like Magery or Power Investiture will want them, as these aid IQ/A spells just as they benefit harder ones. Such traits may be rare in the setting, however – expensive, associated with Unusual Backgrounds, even off-limits to PCs. Or perhaps they're common enough but not useful, because spells that absolutely require them are unavailable and “caster only” items (or *all* magic items) are rare.

Beyond all that, the way *other* advantages work can explain – even empower – casters who specialize in trivial spells.

Languages

see pp. B23-25

Verbal castings might require an obscure magical tongue. If so, casters who *must* speak (skill 14 or less) – or who choose to speak, to avoid gestures (skill 15-19) – cast at -3 if their spoken comprehension is merely Broken (1 point), -1 if Accented (2 points). In addition, nobody can *learn* magic without being able to read this language; the GM may let Broken or Accented written comprehension suffice for new characters, but assess -3 or -1 to rolls to learn spells later on (see *GURPS Social Engineering: Back to School*). It would also be fair to make complete Native comprehension a prerequisite for learning spells.

That definitely fits IQ/H and IQ/VH spells! But it might *not* be true for IQ/A spells, if they have vulgarized versions in workaday languages. Such a ruling makes it cheaper to play hedge magicians than “real wizards.” If both can be PCs, this gives the former a small head start, making the role more attractive.

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Volatility spell, 14.
Water spells, 14, 17; *tips*, 17.
Weather spells, 17.
Wizardly Workshop spell, 12.

Ninety per cent of most magic merely consists of knowing one extra fact.

– Terry Pratchett, *Night Watch*

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